Men and Grief

WHY MEN GRIEVE DIFFERENTLY THAN WOMEN

Current scientific research on the brain indicates that men are functionally different from women. These distinctions account for many of the differences between how men and women process information and the feelings that they have. Coping with grief and loss are no exception. While men and women experience the same grief, they will likely process and express it in very different ways.

THINGS MEN SHOULD KEEP IN MIND WHEN GRIEVING

Because many of society’s stereotypes of how a grieving person should behave are based on the way women grieve, there are some things that men should keep in mind.

• You will grieve in your own way
• There is no how-to guide for how you should grieve
• Your grief process will be influenced by who you are, how you were raised, and your life experiences
• You may not want to talk about it as often as those around you
• You may use action instead of talking to work through your feelings
• Working side by side may be an easier way to process grief than to communicate face to face
• You may prefer to do your healing on your own and through your own inner strength
• You may prefer to take on the role of caretaker of those around you in order to help you process your own grief
• It takes strength and courage to experience and express grief
• Grief is a process that will make you stronger
• All people have a combination of both ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ characteristics that will influence their style of mourning.

ATTEMPTS TO AVOID GRIEF

While society may be changing, the lingering mentally that ‘big boys don’t cry’ leads many men to try to avoid the grief process all together. They may fear that showing their grief will make them look weak. There are some common ways that men attempt to cover up their feelings of grief.

• Silence
• Secrecy
• Anger
• Action
• Addiction
SUPPORTS GROUPS
For many men it helps to talk with other men about their grief. This may be in a support group setting or in some type of community work group. Sometimes an activity that provides a common goal will help men to open to those around them.

LEARNING TO OPEN UP

Many men have been conditioned by society to keep their feelings hidden. The fact that, after a loss, it is more likely that a community will acknowledge a woman’s loss than a man’s reinforces the sense that they should keep their emotions inside. Men who learn to open up and share their grief will have many benefits to their emotional and physical health, as well as for their relationships and marriage. They will also feel more energy and happiness.

WHAT’S MOST IMPORTANT

What is most important is that each person finds a safe way to express their grief. While some may be most comfortable in a support group setting, others may be more comfortable working through their grief on their own, or with the help of educational books or websites. Some use music, art or writing as tools to help them grieve. Some rely on ceremonies or rituals to bring them comfort. As time goes by, the methods used to cope with grief may vary.